



# consumer news

Office of Consumer Affairs

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Vol. 3, No. 11, Sept. 1, 1973 SE

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## Dear Consumer:

Thinking of buying a new car? Don't rely on jingles, flashy commercials or full page ads. Make a list of your needs—for example, four-passenger car for city driving, sports car or a heavy car for superhighways & country roads—shop around & ask questions.

Instead of kicking tires, open the glove compartment & get out the owner's manual. **National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)** requires the manufacturer to state in the manual the car's (1) stopping distance, (2) acceleration & passing ability & (3) tire reserve load.

Instead of asking about interior/exterior color combinations, ask the dealer for data comparing the stopping distance, acceleration & passing ability & tire reserve load for all the cars he sells. NHTSA requires dealers to have such comparative information available in the showroom as well as in a printed form that you can take home or that he can send to you upon request.

Instead of relying on the dealer's estimate of a car's miles per gallon, look for the manufacturer's sticker that gives you information about the car's fuel economy. **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)** has announced a voluntary labeling program that car manufacturers may use in conjunction with the price sticker. Under the program, a manufacturer can use a separate sticker to indicate the car's weight class, gas mileage for that class & annual fuel costs for operating the car for 10,000 miles on gas costing 40¢ a gallon. Or, a manufacturer can use a separate sticker to indicate that model's actual weight, its miles per gallon & estimated gas costs for that weight & comparison figures for that model with average figures for all the manufacturer's models in the same weight class.

Since the labeling program is voluntary, the information probably will not be available for all models. As consumers, however, you can encourage manufacturers to provide the fuel economy information by asking for it when you are in a showroom & by writing to dealers & manufacturers asking for the information, saying you need it to make your decision about which model to buy.

If manufacturers do not provide the information stickers voluntarily, you can get almost every car's mileage from EPA's annual fuel economy report. **CONSUMER NEWS** plans to publish that report as soon as it is available—probably in the Oct. 1, issue.

Considering the present cost of gasoline & probable increases & the cost of buying a new car, it might be worth your while to obtain fuel economy performance information before you buy. Above all, don't forget comparison shopping.

Sincerely,

*Virginia Knauer*

## Vitamins & minerals: I know I need some, but how much?

It's no secret that vitamins & minerals are essential to your daily diet—just as essential as the other nutrients: proteins, carbohydrates & fats [CONSUMER NEWS: April 15, May 1 & Aug. 1]. But are unlimited amounts of vitamins & minerals useful to us? If "some" is good, is "more" better? Or should there be a limit to your vitamin & mineral intake? These questions have been debated heatedly in recent years.

Food & Drug Administration (FDA) has come out with final regulations that strongly support the "limited intake" principle for vitamins & minerals. As part of its major new nutrient labeling program, FDA has adopted a system based on U.S. Recommended Daily Allowances (RDA) for various vitamins & minerals [CONSUMER NEWS: Feb. 1]. FDA bases the RDAs on studies by National Academy of Sciences (NAS) concerning daily intake of vitamins & minerals needed to maintain good health. Ordinarily, most persons can meet the RDAs simply by eating a balanced diet of 3 sensible meals a day. They have no need, therefore, for vitamin or mineral supplements. Occasionally, however, a physician will prescribe a particular supplement for a certain patient—such as iron tablets for someone who is anemic.

Under FDA's new regulations, after Dec. 31, 1974, vitamin & mineral supplements containing more than 150% of RDAs must be labeled & sold as over-the-counter drugs. And as of Oct. 1, this year, high-dosage supplements of Vitamins A & D may be sold only as prescription drugs because excessive amounts of these 2 essential vitamins are known to be toxic [CONSUMER REGISTER: Jan. 15].

Here is a review of the major vitamins & minerals you need:

- Vitamin A promotes normal growth & keeps skin, eyes & mucous membranes healthy. Sources are liver, egg yolk, dark yellow & dark green leafy vegetables, butter, margarine, whole milk & whole milk cheese.

- The B vitamins include B<sub>1</sub> (thiamine), B<sub>2</sub> (riboflavin), B<sub>6</sub>, B<sub>12</sub>, folic acid, niacin, pantothenic acid & biotin. As a group, B vitamins aid in good functioning of the nervous & digestive systems & also help the body release energy from food. In addition, 3 of these B vitamins (B<sub>6</sub>, B<sub>12</sub> & folic acid) help prevent anemia. Sources of B vitamins, in general, are meats (especially organ meats), whole grain or enriched breads & cereals, beans, peas & nuts.

- Vitamin C (ascorbic acid) helps build strong body cells & blood vessels & also aids in healing wounds & broken bones. Sources are citrus fruits, fresh strawberries, tomatoes, cantaloupes, raw or undercooked green peppers, cauliflower, broccoli,

kale & cabbage.

- Vitamin D helps build strong bones & teeth. Milk with Vitamin D added is an excellent source & so is direct sunlight. Small amounts of Vitamin D are also provided by liver, egg yolk & butter.

- Vitamin E acts as a biological preservative of unsaturated fats. Sources are whole grain breads & cereals, vegetable oils, nuts, dark green leafy vegetables & organ meats.

- Calcium—the most abundant mineral in the human body—helps build teeth & bones, aids in blood-clotting & helps muscles & nerves to function well. Sources are primary milk & cheese; other sources are ice cream, egg yolk & dark green leafy vegetables.

- Iodine aids in proper functioning of the thyroid gland. Sources are iodized salt & seafoods.

- Iron combines with protein to make hemoglobin, the red substance in blood. Sources are liver, organ meats, shellfish, dried beans & peas.

To learn more about sources & functions of vitamins & minerals, you might want to read Agriculture Dept's booklets *Family Fare* (45¢) & *Nutritive Value of Foods* (30¢). Both are available from Consumer Product Information, Pueblo, CO 81009. Make check or money order payable to Superintendent of Documents.

## Nutrient data bank

Agriculture Dept. has started sending detailed questionnaires to food processors in a major phase of Agriculture's program to computerize detailed information on the nutrient composition of thousands of foods & beverages. When fully compiled, the computerized Nutrient Data Bank will be an international repository of data on the nutrient composition data for use by nutritionists, food manufacturers & others. Consumers may benefit directly from the data bank in 2 ways:

- Agriculture may well be able to provide computer printouts to answer individual consumer inquiries about nutrition—such as nutrient value of artichokes or all known sources of Vitamin D;

- Agriculture will be able to provide more nutrient data in Agriculture Handbook #8, *Composition of Foods—Raw, Processed, Prepared*. (The handbook is being revised & will be published in looseleaf form to permit frequent updating as the data bank provides new nutrient information.)

## Progress report: Consumer Product Safety Commission

Baby cribs, bicycles & tricycles, glass doors, lawnmowers, minibikes, mobile homes, snowmobiles & swimming pools. These are just a handful of the estimated 10,000 products now under the jurisdiction of the newly-established **Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC)**. In operation since May, the commission has authority to set safety standards for products & to ban those products that are unnecessarily hazardous to consumers. CPSC's jurisdiction covers many household products & appliances, architectural glass, fabrics, toys, product packaging, & other consumer items. It does not have authority over food, drugs, cosmetics, automobiles & some toxic substances (such as insecticides) because other Federal agencies already regulate these products.

A 5 member commission, including Chairman Richard O. Simpson, heads CPSC. A 15 member **Product Safety Council** (made up of 5 members from government, 5 from industry & 5 from consumer & community organizations) advises the commission.

The following are some of CPSC's major actions in its first 3½ months of operation:

- Ruled that mattresses must be made of material that does not catch fire from cigarettes or other small flame sources. Mattresses made after June 22 must be made of flame resistant materials. CPSC has given some companies a 6-month extension to comply with the standard. However, these companies must state on their mattress labels that the mattresses do not meet Federal flammability standards.
- Denied a request by American Home Products Co. to postpone the July 10 date requiring child resistant packaging for aerosol containers of oven cleaning chemicals. The company claimed that certain parts of the new child resistant containers were not available.
- Seized several types of illegal fireworks before July 4. One of the largest seizures involved \$15,000 worth of firecrackers made by South Fireworks Co.
- Issued a public warning about a potential gas leak from certain kinds of Tappan Co. built-in ovens. According to CPSC, the gas leak involved a loose connection in about 12,000 ovens.
- Warned consumers who have bought Little Wonder TV Antenna to unplug & disconnect the antenna to avoid possible electrocution. CPSC said it is taking steps to stop sales of the product by 2 mail order companies: Windsor & Sunset House.
- Urged consumers to immediately discontinue use of 3 aerosol spray adhesives—Foil Art Spray Adhesive & Scotch Brand Spra-Ment made by 3-M Co. & Krylon Spray Adhesive made by The Borden Co.—because the products have been possibly linked to chromosome breaks that could cause multiple birth defects. CPSC said it will use all appropriate means to stop production, distribution & sale of these spray adhesives. (Chromosomal damage presents no immediate danger to children or adults using the sprays for crafts or other hobbies, but there is concern about genetic damage in the future offspring of those now using the sprays.)
- Announced plans Aug. 22 to propose regulations on the tar & nicotine levels of cigarettes. By citing tar & nicotine as hazardous substances, CPSC's regulations could ban some—if not all—cigarette brands.

To help identify other areas where it should get involved, CPSC is relying on the **National Electronic Injury Surveillance System (NEISS)** as a source of injury information [CONSUMER NEWS: Aug. 1]. Statistics already compiled by NEISS show 700,000 injuries a year from children's toys, 500,000 from swings, 150,000 from glass doors & windows, 140,000 from power lawnmowers, 30,000 from defective wall sockets & cords, faulty floor heaters & unvented gas heaters.

Consumers can help the commission by informing it about personal hazardous experiences with consumer products. If the commission receives enough complaints along this line, it will initiate an investigation that could lead to a new product safety regulation. You can also request the commission to issue, change or revoke a product safety regulation. The commission has 120 days to act upon consumer requests. To contact the commission about a consumer product safety problem, write to Consumer Product Safety Commission, Washington, DC 20207.

## Food regulations

Cost of Living Council (CLC) has proposed a second set of Phase 4 regulations covering the cost of food. Scheduled to go into effect Sept. 12, "Stage B" of the regulations will end ceiling prices on beef & will allow the food industry to pass all cost increases through to consumers on a dollar-for-dollar basis. Under "Stage A" of the regulations, which went into effect July 18, food prices could only be increased to reflect raw agricultural cost increases since June 8 on a dollar-for-dollar basis.

The proposed regulations would divide the food industry into 3 segments: wholesalers & retailers, including supermarkets; food services; manufacturers. The following is a summary of how the proposed regulations would apply to each of these segments:

- **Wholesalers & retailers**—These companies would not be allowed to increase prices except to reflect an increase in the cost of the food they sell, & their increases will not be allowed to exceed their customary markup. (If a supermarket marks up products only 2%, it can only increase prices to consumers by 2% to reflect the store's additional cost.)

- **Food Services**—Restaurants, fast-food chains & caterers would be allowed dollar-for-dollar pass through of cost increases for raw agricultural products, rent, labor & other costs. Companies would not be required to give CLC advance notice of price increases. This is because there are few major food concerns, & CLC can regulate them easily.

- **Manufacturers**—Food processors, such as canners & packers, would be controlled in 2 ways. For "ingredient costs," which are mainly foods & additives, manufacturers would be controlled on a "gross margin" basis. Under the "gross margin" rule, manufacturers do not have to pre-notify CLC of their increases (this is because food prices fluctuate widely), but the increases have to reflect costs on a dollar-for-dollar basis. One of the major effects for consumers of the "gross margin" rule is that when costs go down, prices have to go down automatically. Other costs, such as labor & packaging, could be passed along on a dollar-for-dollar basis. To increase prices reflecting these costs, manufacturers would have to comply with cost-justification & prenotification rules that now apply to other sectors of the economy under Phase 4 control. Food manufacturers with sales over \$100 million a year would have to notify CLC in advance of raising prices to reflect such cost increases.

The proposed regulations are open for public comment until Sept. 4. To comment on the proposals, write to Executive Secretariat, Cost of Living Council, 2000 M St. NW, Washington, DC 20508. CLC requests 10 copies of your comments & the designation on the envelope that the comments concern "Stage B" regulations.

CONSUMER NEWS is published the 1st & 15th of each month by the Office of Consumer Affairs, Health, Education & Welfare Dept., to report Federal Government programs for consumers. Use of funds for printing this publication approved by the Director of the Office of Management & Budget, June 27, 1973. Authorization to reproduce any or all items is granted. Editorial address is CONSUMER NEWS, Office of Consumer Affairs, Washington, DC 20201; telephone: 202-962-1608. For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402; subscription \$2 a year, payable to Supt. of Documents. Send changes of address to Superintendent of Documents.

☆ U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1974-546-249/5



OFFICE OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20201

OFFICIAL BUSINESS  
PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE, \$300

POSTAGE AND FEES PAID  
OFFICE OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS



Consumer News: Sept. 1

Send address changes to Supt. of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402.



